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**THE SHADOW
PANDEMIC: DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE DURING THE
COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

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Abstract: According to the Maria da Penha Law, domestic violence against women consists of any action or omission based on gender that causes death, injury and physical, sexual or psychological suffering within the scope of the domestic unit, the family or any intimate relationship of affection. Under this bias, during the pandemic period, as a result of widespread orders to stay at home to curb the spread of Covid-19, women were forced to be isolated along with their potential aggressors. This way, we seek to analyze whether there was an intensification of gender violence, called Shadow Pandemic, during the pandemic. For this purpose, a literary review and documental analysis of official indexes made available by specialized institutes are used as a methodology. In this sense, according to administrative data from the police, telephone support lines for women victims of domestic violence and internet searches in several countries, violence against girls and women has intensified as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. According to UN Women research, 1 in 2 women know a female person who was a victim of domestic violence during the pandemic. It is therefore concluded that Covid-19 intensified a pre-existing crisis, revealing connections between violence, unemployment, financial tensions and food insecurity.

Keywords: Shadow Pandemic. Domestic violence. Pandemic. Covid-19.

INTRODUCTION

Gender-based oppression is expressed in many ways in society, with domestic and family violence being one of the most common forms of abuse. In this sense, according to Report A/77/302 of August 18, 2022 by the Secretary General of the United Nations (UN, 2022, p. 2), violence against women and girls persists as a global crisis, with the opinion The most recent World Health Organization –

Violence Against Women Prevalence Estimates 2018 – determined that the rates of violence against women have remained the same over the last decade, with one in three females being victims of physical or sexual violence at least once during their lives (WHO, 2021, p. 18).

Under this bias, according to the report “Visible and invisible: the victimization of women in Brazil” published in 2023 by the Brazilian Public Security Forum, 33.4% of Brazilian women, aged 16 or over, have already been victims of physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner. Furthermore, if psychological violence is considered, such as humiliation, name calling and insults, the percentage of female victims reaches 43% (BRAZIL, 2023, p. 15).

Thus, when analyzing the contexts of violence perpetuated against women, it is clear that the family environment is generally a dangerous place for people of the female gender, which does not occur with men, who are more frequently attacked. by friends and colleagues (Ipea, 2020, pp. 15-18). Thus, it is possible to infer, as Segato (2018) points out, that the higher incidence of domestic and family violence among women is linked to the constitution and perpetuation of patriarchy as a form of female domination and the transformation of gender hierarchies into a constitutive element. of power relations.

As a structural component of power, Marcela Lagarde (2008) states that cases of domestic violence against women, in addition to reflecting violent and patriarchal regions and cultures, also reflect the consent – disguised – of the States themselves, which, according to treaties international laws, internal legal codes and jurisprudence of modernity, must guarantee its protection.

In this context, during the pandemic period and the widespread stay-at-home orders to curb the spread of Covid-19, aggression

against females has intensified due to forced coexistence, economic stress and fears about the coronavirus in general. (SWITZERLAND, 2020), therefore pushing domestic violence shelters and helplines to reach their maximum capacities, according to the report *Measuring the Shadow Pandemic: Violence against Women during Covid-19*, released in 2021 by UN Women (2021).

Thus, noting the relevance of this theme in the current social panorama, the justification for the development of the present work is verified. Therefore, initially, the aim is to define domestic and family violence according to international organizations and national laws. Soon after, the Covid-19 pandemic and its prophylactic methods are addressed, seeking, finally, to study how a calamity situation in public health intensified a pre-existing crisis, revealing connections between violence, unemployment, financial tensions and food insecurity, focusing on the analysis of data from the state of Ceará.

OBJECTIVES

This summary has the general objective of analyzing the increase in the number of cases of domestic violence during the pandemic period, highlighting the relationship between the occurrence of these crimes with socioeconomic markers, such as gender, race and class. Among the specific objectives, we highlight the identification of the causal link between social isolation measures and the increase in gender violence and the intersectional examination of victims of domestic violence in the state of Ceará in the years 2020 and 2021.

METHODOLOGY

As a research methodology, literature review is used, through bibliography examination (scientific articles, theses, dissertations, monographs and specialized

doctrine), in addition to document analysis of official data made available by specialized institutes, such as the Brazilian Public Security Forum, the Institute for Applied Economic Research (Ipea) and the Institute for Research and Economic Strategy of Ceará (IPECE); the research is pure, with a qualitative approach, with descriptive, explanatory and exploratory objectives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE: FROM DEFINITION TO COMBAT

According to the United Nations, domestic violence, also called domestic abuse or intimate partner violence, can be classified as a pattern of behavior, in any relationship, that is used to obtain or maintain power and control. Abuses are physical, sexual, emotional, economic or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person, including, therefore, any behavior that frightens, intimidates, terrifies, manipulates, hurts, humiliates or blames someone. Indeed, domestic abuse can happen to anyone of any race, age, sexual orientation, religion or gender and affects citizens of all socioeconomic backgrounds and levels of education (UN, 2023).

In this context, due to the high rates of physical and psychological aggression against females in Brazil, on August 7, 2006, Law about domestic and family violence against women, pursuant to § 8 of art. 226 of the Federal Constitution, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Inter-American Convention to Prevent, Punish and Eradicate Violence against Women.

Initially, Law number 11.340/2006 determines, in its art. 5, that domestic and family violence against women consists of any action or omission based on gender that causes

death, injury, physical, sexual or psychological suffering and moral or patrimonial damage within the scope of the domestic unit, the family or any other intimate relationship of affection, regardless of sexual orientation.

Thus, from this legislation, Brazilian women began to be protected by a precious statute, not only of a repressive character, but, mainly, preventive and assistance, developing several mechanisms capable of curbing these hostile acts, being considered by the United Nations one of the three most advanced legislation on the subject worldwide (IMP, 2023).

THE PANDEMIC AND DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), Covid-19 is an infectious disease caused by Sars-CoV-2, a virus first identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, China. Indeed, this virus spreads through direct, indirect contact (contaminated surfaces or objects) or close contact (1m range) with infected people, through saliva, secretions or respiratory droplets expelled by coughing, sneezing or talking, therefore making it highly contagious (World Health Organization, 2020).

Because it was a previously unknown disease, at the beginning of the pandemic period, there was no scientific research on the drugs and medical treatments that must be used for its containment. In view of this, the main prophylactic means adopted were social isolation, physical distancing and the use of personal protective equipment (World Health Organization, 2020).

As a result of these measures, women and girls previously victims of domestic and family violence were isolated at home with their potential abusers, leading to an increase in the number of aggressions and even cases of femicide in several countries (UNICEF, 2020,

p. two). Furthermore, formal and informal combat and victim assistance services were severely compromised, making access to information and help even more difficult (UNICEF, 2020, p. 4). Indeed, the restriction on opening hours, the circulation difficulties imposed by the social isolation measures and the reduction of care teams affected the health, social assistance, security and access to justice services available to people in situations of violence (BRAZIL, 2023, p. 8).

The *lockdowns* also impacted the world economy, contributing to increased levels of poverty and food insecurity, which disproportionately affected females, since, due to the gender-based power dynamics currently in place, men, in general, control family finances and can therefore deprive women of their economic freedom (UNICEF, 2020, p. 3).

Furthermore, in most households, girls and women are responsible for most of the housework. This way, due to the closure of schools, they assumed the responsibility of taking care of the children, having to give up their paid jobs. Indeed, research shows that females have been disproportionately more affected by job losses and the economic downturn caused by the Covid-19 pandemic (UNICEF, 2020, pp. 3-4).

Soon, it is clear that, while the spread of the coronavirus worried national and international bodies, receiving due media attention, behind this state of calamity, women and girls were being victims of physical and psychological violence inside their homes, with little or no government aid at their disposal, so there is a second pandemic, a pandemic behind the shadows (*shadow pandemic*).

DATA FROM SHADOW PANDEMIC IN THE WORLD AND IN BRAZIL

According to research developed by UN Women, 243 million women and girls between

15 and 49 years of age were victims of sexual and/or physical violence perpetrated by an intimate partner in 2020 (UN, 2020, p.19).

In France, reports of domestic violence increased by 30% after the *lockdown* was enacted on March 17, 2020. In Argentina, emergency calls for cases of domestic violence grew by 25% since the implementation of social isolation measures on the day March 20, 2020. In Cyprus and Singapore, help contacts recorded a 30% and 33% increase in calls respectively (UN, 2020, p. 19).

Furthermore, reports on the use of helplines show that, in China, there was a 90% increase in complaints; in Colombia, during the first two weeks of strict social isolation, reports of violence against women increased by 250%; in Tunisia, the number of calls quintupled during the lockdown; and finally, in the first six weeks of lockdown, Italy recorded a 73% growth in calls to a national helpline compared to the same period in 2019 (UNICEF, 2020, p. 3). There was also an increase in cases of domestic violence and demand for emergency shelters in Canada, Germany, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States (UN, 2020, p. 19).

In Brazil, the Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights (MMFDH), in partnership with the National Ombudsman for Human Rights (ONDH), announced that, during the months of February, March and April 2020, the number of reports of domestic and family violence grew by 14.12% compared to the same period in 2019 (BRAZIL, 2020).

Under this bias, according to the Brazilian Public Security Forum (FBSP), one in four Brazilian women over the age of 16 claims to have suffered some type of violence during the Covid-19 pandemic (BRAZIL, 2021, p. 21). In addition, the percentage of domestic violence increased from 42% in 2019 to 48.8% in 2021, while aggression against females on the street fell from 29% to 19% (G1 SP, 2021).

In this context, in 2020, 4.3 million women claimed to have been physically assaulted with slaps, punches or kicks, meaning that, every minute, 8 women were beaten in Brazil during the coronavirus pandemic; approximately 13 million were victims of verbal abuse, this being the most common form of violence; about 3.7 million have suffered sexual offenses or forced attempts to have sex; 2.1 million suffered threats with a knife or firearm; and 1.6 million were beaten or suffered strangulation attempts (BRAZIL, 2021, pp. 21-23).

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that 61.8% of women victims of aggression in 2020 claimed to have a reduced family income as a result of the pandemic, and 46.7% of them lost their jobs during this period (BRAZIL, 2021, p. 19). In addition, the percentage of violence is higher among younger women (35.2% between 16 and 24 years old), black (28.3%) and with low education (20.6% with primary education and 26.8% with high school) (BRAZIL, 2021, p. 23).

Finally, it must also be noted that the home is the area at greatest risk for females, with 48.8% of cases occurring indoors, with partners and exes being the main perpetrators of domestic and family violence. -partners, followed by father, mother, brother, sister, stepfather, stepmother, son and daughter, corroborating the idea that, during the pandemic period, there was a general increase in intrafamily violence against girls and women (BRAZIL, 2021, p. 12).

THE SHADOW PANDEMIC IN THE STATE OF CEARÁ

On March 15, 2020, the Secretary of Health of the State of Ceará confirmed the first three cases of Covid-19 in the state (G1 CE, 2020) and, therefore, the then Governor Camilo Santana issued Decree of March 16, 2020, declaring a public health emergency and establishing the first strict social isolation

(CEARÁ, 2020).

In this context, according to “Enfoque na economia” nº 235 – The Covid-19 Pandemic and Domestic Violence in Women from Ceará” – developed by the Institute for Research and Economic Strategy of Ceará (IPECE), the state recorded, from the decree of lockdown in 2020, a significant increase in the number of complaints registered by the Maria da Penha Law, from 1,067 victims, in April 2020, to 1,623 victims, in July of the same year, an increase of more than 52% during the period. However, when there was easing and gradual economic reopening in the state, there was a mitigating but persistent increase in cases, reaching a maximum value of 1,883 records of domestic and family violence in the state (IPECE, 2022, p. 2).

Already in March 2021, with the enactment of the second lockdown, the number of complaints of aggression against women increased again, while, in September of the same year, as a result of vaccination and greater economic flexibility, the numbers dropped again (IPECE, 2022, p. 3).

Furthermore, it is possible to infer from the IPECE report that most occurrences are concentrated in the interior of the state of Ceará. In fact, in 2020, 9,172 complaints were registered in the interior municipalities, against 6,714 in the capital Fortaleza and 3,017 in the metropolitan region, while, in 2021, 8,994 cases were recorded in the interior, 6,944 in the capital and, finally, 2,951 in the Metropolitan region. Furthermore, the interior recorded the highest number of cases in November 2021, while the capital and the metropolitan region had the peak of cases in January 2021 (IPECE, 2022, pp. 2-3).

In summary, compared to 2019, there was an increase of 62.89% in cases of domestic and family violence in Ceará during the period of strict social isolation as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, registering, in 2021, almost 19,000

cases of aggression against women and girls, most of the victims living in the interior of the state (IPECE, 2022, p. 4).

These data recorded and released by IPECE corroborate the understanding that the mitigation strategies of the Covid-19 virus contributed to the increase in gender violence and demonstrate that it is fundamental to consider the geography of corporeity’s (place of residence) to analyze the conditions of risk and vulnerability of victims of violence.

CONCLUSION

From the investigation carried out, it was found that, as a result of forced coexistence, economic stress and fears involved in a situation of public health calamity, there was a considerable increase in the rates of domestic and family violence during the pandemic period. In this context, the management of the Covid-19 pandemic, with social isolation as the main prophylactic measure, was responsible for increasing the vulnerability of girls and women around the world, especially black, poor, low-educated women who live in cities in the inside.

In fact, the increase in situations of aggression during a period of physical and economic insecurity stems from the patriarchal logic of submission of female bodies, therefore, social isolation is not the only cause of this situation, but only a propitious moment for the intensification of the precarious condition imputed to women due to sexism, racism and classism.

It is concluded, therefore, that the government strategies put into practice with the aim of controlling the spread of the Covid-19 virus directly contributed to the increase in domestic and family violence against women around the world. This way, measures designed to keep populations safe have had the diametrically opposite effect on the lives of women and girls.

Finally, it is emphasized the importance of developing more in-depth intersectional research on the subject so that it is possible to develop public policies capable of

guaranteeing the physical, psychological and economic safety of females and of reducing the harmful effects of Covid-19 pandemic to achieve gender equality.

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